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NEWS RELEASE

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USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PRESENTS SEVERAL MISSISSIPPI COUNTY AGENCIES GRANTS TOTALING \$ 277,650

Mississippi County Ambulance District Office was the setting for a Mock Check presentation from Gregory C. Branum, Missouri State Director for USDA Rural Development, for several projects in Mississippi County on November 28, 2005. Branum presented several agencies checks totaling \$277,650. The grants are part of the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities loan and grant program.

"Missouri is home to some of the best-trained law enforcement officials and first responders in the country, and we need to make certain they have access to the best equipment to do their jobs," said Senator James M. Talent. "One of the reasons I support the grant process is because it's a way for the federal government to partner with local communities. Our job is to find out what our first responders in Missouri need and then do whatever we can to meet those needs. In this case, first responders in Mississippi County told us they needed new vehicles and we fulfilled their request."

U. S. Representative Jo Ann Emerson said, "Our rural first responders are on the front lines of all kinds of emergencies, and they face challenges and circumstances you don't ordinarily find in the cities: for example, their emergency vehicles see a lot more hard miles. The upgrades we are announcing today represent a tremendous investment in health and safety for Southern Missouri. I appreciate the hard work of our two U.S. Senators, Kit Bond and Jim Talent, on this funding, as well as the ability of USDA Rural Development to identify opportunities to improve the quality of life in Southern Missouri and to disburse these federal funds."

"Funding important projects like this by Rural Development mirrors President Bush's initiative of being committed to the future of rural communities," Branum added. "Appreciation is also extended to U.S. Senators "Kit" Bond and Jim Talent and U.S. Representative Jo Ann Emerson for supporting USDA Rural Development. They have been strong proponents for the necessary funding for essential services for rural Missourians."

Mississippi County Ambulance District was presented a mock check totaling \$100,950 to be used to purchase four new cardiac defibrillators/monitors and a new ambulance for Mississippi County. Board of Director's President, Bill Feezor stated, "We are excited about this opportunity to partner with USDA, Rural Development and maintain the level of care the Ambulance District is always striving for. This is a return of our tax dollars to the community and we appreciate this grant assistance."

The Mississippi County Rescue Squad received \$37,500 to purchase a new vehicle to carry the response equipment. This vehicle will replace a high mileage vehicle. Director Danny Harris said, "The Rescue Squad is a true non-profit organization and is vital to the residents of the County. Almost all of the funds we receive are from donations and fund raising activities. It is important to keep our equipment up-dated to meet the goals of the Squad and we cannot thank USDA, Rural Development enough for this grant."

Branum presented a mock check to Jim Blumberg, Presiding Commissioner and Keith Moore, Mississippi County Sheriff for \$30,000 to be used to purchase two new 4 wheel drive vehicle for the Sheriff's Department. Moore stated, "As Sheriff of Mississippi County as well as the entire Sheriff's Department, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for the acceptance of the grant my department was recently awarded."

"As the Sheriff of a county with the lowest tax-base in the entire bootheel of Missouri, I cannot convey to you enough the seriousness of the financial situation we are experiencing. The everyday expenses are difficult enough to meet, much less the expense of new equipment, such as the vehicles that were awarded through the grant," said Sheriff Moore.

"The vehicles will be such a great improvement to the fleet of our old, and some un-repairable vehicles that my staff has currently been attempting to exist with. The new vehicles will enable my department to perform their duties in a more efficient, safe, and timely manner."

"Once again, I want to thank your department for the grant that was awarded for the Mississippi County Sheriff's Department, as well as making the citizens of this county safer by allowing the deputies to arrive to their calls in a more timely and safe manner. It is truly a win – win situation for all of us!"

Mayor Jack Feezor said, "The City of Charleston is grateful for the opportunity that Rural Development has allowed us with the approval of this grant." The City of Charleston received a grant of \$63,000.00. "Without this grant, the City would not be able to purchase four new patrol cars, which are greatly needed at this time," stated Feezor.

City of East Prairie Mayor, Gene Ditto said, "Thanks to USDA Rural Development the City of East Prairie Police Department will have two brand-new, fully-equipped police cars. Had our City not been chosen to receive these two fully-equipped vehicles, we would have purchased one used Highway Patrol Car with the money we had budgeted. Instead we can take the budgeted amount to pay our 25% share of the total cost with USDA giving 75% of that total. Thanks USDA for all your support." Branum presented a check in the amount of \$46,200.00 to the City of East Prairie.

USDA Rural Development's mission is to deliver programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural residents. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and critical community and technology infrastructure. Further information on rural programs is available by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/mo> or by contacting Cathy Walters, Rural Development Manager, at the Charleston Local Office of USDA Rural Development at 831 S. Hwy 105, Charleston, MO 63834 or by calling 573-649-9947.

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